

Press Release

For More Information, Call:

PEGGY NOEL or CHUCK MINSKER

Huntington District

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

502 8th St., Huntington, WV 25701

304-529-5452

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Corps to Host Public Hearing to Discuss Environmental Impact Statement

HUNTINGTON, WV....A public hearing will be offered on July 24 at the Charleston Civic Center Little Theater, 200 Civic Center Drive, to present the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) released May 29 by Federal and State agencies. The hearing will consist of two sessions: the first from 2:00pm to 5:00pm; and the second from 7:00pm to 11:00pm.

The public is invited to provide oral comments on the draft EIS during the hearing. The EIS recommends new actions to further enhance protection for Appalachian streams from effects associated with mountaintop coal mining.

Information in the draft EIS shows that program improvements put in place by Federal and State agencies since 1998 are contributing to increased environmental protection during mountaintop coal mining. Permit data comparing surface coal mining operations approved since 1998 with those authorized for the five years prior to 1998 show that the total area of Appalachian watersheds covered by valley fills was cut by over 50 percent and the total length of streams covered by those fills was cut by over 25 percent.

The draft EIS evaluates a broad range of additional Federal and State actions proposed to further prevent or reduce adverse environmental impacts to Appalachian streams, as well as to clarify lines of responsibility among the agencies designed to improve compliance with and enforcement of the Clean Water Act and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

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Among the recommendations of the draft EIS: better stream protection; improved compensatory mitigation requirements to ensure replacement of lost aquatic functions through stream restoration; more watershed level advance planning to identify environmental resources where impacts should be avoided; review current Clean Water Act water quality standards to ensure they protect against potential water quality impacts downstream of mining operations; clarify regulations to ensure that fills, when necessary, are as small as possible and located where they cause the least environmental impact; develop Best Management Practices for mine site reclamation to better avoid adverse environmental impacts; and promote the benefits of reforestation.

The agencies involved in preparation of the draft EIS include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Surface Mining and West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.

Written comments are also welcome and should be submitted by August 29, 2003 to Mr. John Forren, U.S. EPA (3ES30), 1650 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

Copies of the draft EIS may be requested by calling the EPA Region 3 toll free EIS request hotline at 1-800-228-8711.